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A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT

HIGHGATE CHAPEL,

JANUARY 17, 1773.

ON OCCASION OF THE

D E A T H

OF THE REVEREND

MR. WADHAM KNATCHBULL,
M. A.

STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH.

AND

PREACHER OF HIGHGATE CHAPEL.

By WILLIAM FELTON, M. A.

L O N D O N:

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BY WILLIAM FELTON, M.A.

PRINTED BY W. TAYLOR, OF GUY'S INN, LONDON.

THIS
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PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST
OF SEVERAL
WORTHY PERSONS,
WHOM THE
A U T H O R
SHALL ALWAYS THINK HIMSELF
HAPPY TO OBLIGE,
IS INSCRIBED TO THEM,
WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT,
BY THEIR
MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

Highgate,
Feb. 22, 1773.

W. FELTON.

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W. F. L. T. O. N.

1773

Rev. Chap. ii. v. 10.

*Be thou faithful unto Death, and I
will give thee a Crown of Life.*

THESE words are introduced with great solemnity as the exhortation of our Saviour to the church of Smyrna, and command the attention of all who believe the gospel. All are equally obliged to continue in the true doctrine of the gospel, and to be examples of the same holiness of conversation and pious zeal which were conspicuous in the first christians. Every one ought to consider whe-
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ther he adorns the profession which he assumes by actions worthy of it; or, if there be occasion, to strengthen the things which remain, if any inclinations to good, any good desires, or religious principles before they are quite dead and destroyed. Every one is admonished to examine his spiritual state and disposition, whether he is improved in the knowledge and practice of true religion, and is zealous of good works, or is slow and indifferent about fulfilling his obligation. If he has only a faint sense of his duty, and wants a firm and stedfast resolution to perform it, he is admonished to shake off this indolence, and to excite himself to a zeal to shew a conversation and diligence in well-doing worthy of his character, and answerable to the hope of a christian. And it is not enough to begin well; he must persevere and be faithful unto death, if he desires to receive a crown of life.

I shall explain and inforce this indispensable duty of faithfulness and perseverance as the only certain means of obtaining the reward of heaven.

Faith-

Faithfulness has respect to a trust reposed in us, and is the best use and improvement of the talents and abilities imparted to us. The great business here required of us is to be faithful in the use of the gospel, the greatest and best talent committed to us by divine goodness, by the right use of which we shall make the best improvement in the most reasonable service to God, and have the clearest assurance of his eternal favour.

Faithfulness is an universal duty, as all are capable of it. All are equally capable of performing their duty in an acceptable manner, tho' with inferior abilities and in the lowest station. Every one is capable of profiting by the gospel to his eternal welfare, tho' not made to excell. Every one is not capable of great advancement in knowledge, and abounding in eminent good works profitable unto men; but every one is required to improve in christian knowledge, and to promote it among others according to the ability which God has given; and to do well in his station and set a good example of obedi-

ence to the gospel. His light may shine before men, tho' not so conspicuous as that of others which is larger and brighter. Faithfulness will be as much approved in the good use of a small talent as of a large one; and of one as of ten. Only let not one be despised because it is little; nor let the possession of more and greater make any vain and arrogant. For what have any which they did not receive as an unmerited gift of the divine bounty? Let him that glorieth then, glory in the Lord; and remember, that the highest commendation is bestowed upon fidelity and diligence in our service. It will be no part of our praise hereafter that we were great, noble, mighty, wise and learned, successful and eminent in the world; but only, that we were faithful in doing the will of God. And we shall perceive that there is less excuse for remissness, if we consider in what condition and circumstances the first christians deserved the highest commendations for their zeal and faithfulness. They embraced and exercised their religion under the greatest discouragements; and their faith was tried by the severest persecutions, and stood the trial.

At that time faithfulness was chiefly distinguished by constancy in suffering for the sake of the gospel; and the exhortation to be faithful unto death, seems to be principally intended to arm the minds of believers against the terror of persecution, or the fear of shame or reproach, which might tempt them to deny the faith. The members of the primitive churches were many of them destitute of all worldly convenience and benefit, and afflicted with every suffering which the rage and malice of their enemies could invent; and yet they persevered in the constant profession of the faith, and were conspicuous examples of all virtue and piety, in meekness, patience, and charity. These storms are now ceased, and our situation with respect to the profession of our faith, and the exercise of our religion, is as easy and free from molestation as can be desired or imagined. Our religion is established by law, our churches are open, and every one is invited to enter into them; and we may perform every part of our religious duty not only in peace and security, but with reputation.

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And yet, can we say that religion increases in power and esteem among us, in proportion to the liberty we enjoy, and the encouragement we have to practise it? we have need to attend to the earnest admonition "to be faithful unto death," although we are in no fear of persecution, and all outward danger is removed far from us. For there are temptations to unfaithfulness in safety and prosperity. In the time of danger and adversity the mind is put upon it's guard; but in the season of prosperity and quietness, it is apt to fall into sloth and indolence. Danger makes men watchful, and affliction naturally subdues their pride, and teaches them sobriety and temperance; but ease and security bring on inattention and carelessness, nourish the warm passions, and lead to excess. It is necessary therefore at all times to keep ourselves under a moral restraint, that we may not be corrupted by the fashionable vices of the world, or become wavering and unstable in our duty. But further, in order to be found faithful, we must produce the fruits of faith by an active obedience to the gospel. For true faith doth not consist in opinions or right notions

notions and persuasion of the truth of the doctrines of the gospel; it must be something more substantial, otherwise it will pass away as the morning cloud. It is not only a conviction of the truth of the gospel, but a religious principle which worketh in the children of obedience. It is the fear of God restraining us from sin, and the love of God manifested in the exercise of all goodness. — It is a fatal error to rest in an unfruitful faith, or nominal profession. It will be of no benefit to have a right understanding of religion without the practice. The gospel is not only a rule of faith, but of life. — It is designed for the improvement of our minds and manners; for the improvement of our minds, by a profitable and edifying knowledge of the will of God; and of our manners, by applying it to the correction of our faults, the amendment of our lives, and perfecting ourselves in holiness and virtue.

Faith, or knowledge, profiteth nothing without a right use and application in practice. — As the knowledge of medicine would

would avail nothing to the recovery or preservation of health without care to make a proper use of it, and that bodily exercise which is required to make it effectual. It is not then sufficient for our salvation to believe and confess that Christ is the Saviour of the world.—We must be faithful and diligent in the practice of all the parts of duty commanded in the gospel. It is not sufficient to believe, though with the greatest sincerity, what Christ has done, and what the gospel declares he will do for us; but our sincerity must be proved by obedience to his precepts. They will not be accounted good and faithful servants, who say, Lord, Lord! who own his authority, and desire his mercy, and neglect to do the will of their heavenly Father. Many have the name of Christ in their mouths, and profess great admiration and love of him, and a zeal for the promotion and success of the Christian religion, who make only an outward shew of it, having only a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof.—This is unfaithfulness and hypocrisy in those who know their Lord's will and live in contempt of

of it as a rule of practice.—I need not observe to you that they are unworthy of the name of Christ's Disciples, who are guilty of notorious offences and transgressions, which those, who desire to preserve any character, are ashamed of. But I would give you a caution against that indifference, with respect to religion, which is visible among us, and that sordid regard to interest which prevails over the motives of the gospel; and that self-love, and self-flattery, by which so many deceive themselves, and invent palliations and excuses for omissions and failures, and actual transgressions of their duty. Men deceive themselves when they make exceptions to the authority and strictness of the gospel, in any instance, and do not acknowledge their obligation to the whole law, but seek for evasions, and presume to grant themselves a liberty and indulgence which the written rule forbids, or does not allow.—As when the young think the restraints of the gospel too severe, and that they may gratify themselves in those things to which the warm passions of that age prompt them, which is the
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very reason for self-denial, watchfulness, and restraint of their passions. For does not reason teach us to be watchful where there is danger, to guard against those temptations to which we are most subject, and to lay the strictest restraint upon those passions which are most violent? The passions of youth then afford no excuse for their offences, nor is the restraint of the law of God too strict, because it only requires of every one that self-government on which their future welfare depends. And our sincerity and faithfulness are most properly tried, in submitting to those restraints which are least agreeable, in refraining from those faults, or sinful indulgencies, to which we are most inclined, from the force of natural passion and temper, or our occupation and condition in life: and our virtue is proved, and is most praise-worthy in performing those duties, or obeying those divine commands, to which we have some reluctance in our wills or temper.

Therefore the young are exhorted to be sober minded, and to flee youthful lusts,

lusts, and excess in the pursuit of pleasure, by which persons of that inconsiderate season of life are most apt to be misled and depraved; and in general it is of the utmost importance to avoid evil company, whose corrupt conversation too frequently hurts and destroys good principles and good manners. Such have not much need to be exhorted to flee from covetousness, as not being inclined to that vice. But admonitions of this kind are often found necessary for those who are more advanced in years, and exercised in worldly business.

Thus we see that our fidelity is shewn in resisting those temptations which are most pleasing and find the easiest access; and these have the greatest power over us. And he is faithful who performs the duties to which he is called; and every duty is appointed in its proper place and season. All trees do not bear the same fruit; but they are known to be good by their fruits, if they be good in their kind.

Thus therefore the young are exhorted to be sober minded, and to flee youthful lusts

Thus there are different duties for persons of different characters, offices, and stations; and they may be fruitful in good works according to their several abilities, all members in the body have not the same office, but every one may be rightly used; and every member of the community may answer the end of its appointment. It is not in the power of every one to excell and abound in such good works as are profitable and conspicuous; but every one may serve God with sincerity, may have that real love of God, which inclines him to keep all the commandments without making exceptions to any. He who is faithful will shew the same willingness to obey every precept without partiality, and without hypocrisy. It is not a superficial religion, an outward conformity to its rites as a compliance with custom, which will avail to our justification, but that which proceeds from the heart, from true faith, and sincere affection. It is sincere devotion, zeal in good practice, and perseverance in well doing.

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Having

aged twenty seven years.
 beginning of the year 1770, and died January 6th 1773.
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Having explained the instruction contained in the text, I beg leave to recommend it from the example of one with which you were well acquainted, who hath approved himself a faithful servant of God, and minister of the gospel in the course of a very few years*. But excellent examples are frequently of short continuance; they are only shewn to the world, and we are soon deprived of the sight of them, to remind us of the instability of the best things on earth, and of the uncertainty of human life, and of our duty to make the best use of our time which so quickly passeth away. Permit me then to pay the small tribute of my esteem to the memory of your deceased preacher, one who was worthy of that name, and an ornament to his profession. In the proper and edifying manner of his preaching, in the fervency which spoke the sincerity of his heart, in his unblameable behaviour and conversation, free from all conceit and vanity, he was a pattern to the younger clergy. His

* He was elected preacher of Highgate chapel in the beginning of the year 1770, and died January 6th 1773, aged twenty seven years.

His good example was worthy of the imitation of all. But the good example of a young person has a great advantage in the recommendation of piety and virtue, as it appears more amiable and inviting. And in some of his discourses in which he reproved the vicious manners of the age, I have been reminded of the Poet's description of an angelic personage contending with Satan,

— His grave rebuke,
Severe in youthful beauty, added grace
Invincible — *

and his whole behaviour shewed that he had studied the apostolic directions for the conduct of a minister, which St. Paul gave to Timothy and Titus his sons in the gospel, and had formed his manners upon that excellent model. Holding faith in a pure conscience, and guarding himself with such prudence, that no man should find occasion to despise his youth, being sober minded, and in all things shewing himself a pattern of good works, in doctrine, and in life, in uncorrupt-

unecorruptness, gravity, sincerity." His proficiency in learning, his clear understanding and right judgment, his un-reproveable behaviour, by which he had acquired an universal esteem, had raised the most promising expectations of his advancement to a more eminent station in the church; and if by the permission of divine providence he had lived to attain it, I am persuaded that he would have exerted his talents with still greater application, and have become more useful, as he would have found greater opportunity and a larger field for action*. But it hath pleased God to disappoint these flattering hopes. His course was finished in a short time, and he hath left his example for imitation!

Mysterious are the ways of providence, tho' just; and it becomes us to shew our acknowledgement of the divine wisdom by our submission to the will of God, and our approbation of it's decrees, by our patient resignation under every affliction and disappointment of our wishes.

Let

* Εργε δε βλαπτος ηντις αρχεται καλως, και τας τελευτας εικος εσθ' υτως εχειν. SOPHOCLES.

Let us look back to the instruction of the text, to be diligent in our christian duty. The young are admonished to learn wisdom and discretion, a qualification of which they are capable, their most becoming ornament, and necessary for their safe conduct thro' the many and perilous temptations which will beset them in the voyage of their future life. Let the young therefore study to be wise and good, because their faculties are strong and vigorous, and they will either strengthen themselves in the habit of religion and virtue, or be more violently carried away into the excess of vice. And let those who advance to a riper age increase in wisdom, and be more fruitful in all virtue; and it is expected from those who grow old, to be more established in the practice of virtue and religion, and to bring their fruit unto perfection." Let us remember the condition of our warfare, that if we are faithful unto death, the truth of God cannot fail, and he will fulfill his promise and give us a crown of life, which will be an abundant satisfaction and recompence for all our sufferings, under the oppressions and persecutions.

secutions of evil minded men. When we receive this recompence, all the difficulties we have gone through in the performance of our duty will seem as nothing; the hope of it is so strong in good men that it overcomes the terror of death, and enables them to rejoice in their dissolution and departure, because **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND.**

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